MORALITY
IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S NOVELS

BY

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CHAPTER I

A PROBLEM

The moral questions which have absorbed many past American writers such as Hawthorne find present-day expression in the works of William Faulkner. Prolific in his task of creating a fictional Mississippi county, Faulkner has willingly grappled with the workings of morality on many levels and has thus built up a world of rare moral complexity, complicated at times by ambiguities and at other times by a kind of poetic mysticism.

Since Mr. Faulkner has seen fit to write the great bulk of his material about one area, including all of his novels which are generally considered to be most important, a study of his views should not be too amiss if it chooses to ignore the much smaller amount of material which he has produced about parts totally foreign to his mythical Mississippi county. The boundaries of Yoknapatawpha County encompass 2400 square miles of farm land, abused by generations of cotton growing, and piney woods where a proper hunter may still find a deer to shoot.[1] In

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[1]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), see map of Yoknapatawpha County covering last two pages.

the early days the settler could shoot enough game from his back door to feed himself in a grand manner, while the modern tenant farmer draws from his landlord's commissary to sustain his family. Where once the Indian lived in simplicity, the Negro now lives in poverty. It is an imaginary land created from Faulkner's intimate immersion in his own Mississippi community and shaped by a poet's sensibility.

Jefferson is the county seat and center of the arena of Faulkner's action. Razed during the Civil War and rebuilt in spite of the carpetbaggers, the business district is clustered about a square containing a court house. The court house and the activities of the judges, lawyers, and various officers of the law figure prominently in many of Faulkner's novels and stories.

Populating the county is a rich assortment of people varying through an extensive spectrum of personality and behavior. Negroes make up three-fifths of the population, most of them very poor but quite adept at coping with their poverty. Although there is little social stratification among the negroes, they are distinct individuals and present a wide variety of moral behavior. Dilsey, nominally a servant to the Compson family, is actually the tower of strength upon which her white folks lean. And Ringo of The Unvanquished develops into a kind of black Robin Hood as the right hand of Granny Millard of the Sartoris family. On the other end of the negro scale is

Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, the flashy murderer of Go Down Moses, and off by himself is Joe Christmas, the tormented murderer of Light in August, who knows not whether he is a Negro or a white and demands the right to be neither.

The range of personalities of the whites is more diverse than those of the negroes because their milieu contains the additional dimensions of social and educational development. At the end of the scale are the poor whites, like the Bundrens of As I Lay Dying, living in a state of what Santayana would call pre-rational morality.[1] Most of their actions are based upon simple wants for which they can draw upon a conglomerate of traditional precepts, maxims, and customs as guides. The poor whites shade into the more prosperous farmers and tradesmen. Ratliff, the sewing machine agent, is the traveling news carrier for all the honest, hard-working folks of the county and is their most eloquent spokesman. Love of family and home plus a high regard for self respect typify these people.

Faulkner presents a picture of Southern aristocracy seldom matched for feeling and lucidity. He traces their development from hard-fought beginnings in the early nineteenth century through the ante-bellum opulence and splendor, the war itself, and the subsequent decline of

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[1]George Santayana, "Reason in Ethics," Classic American Philosophers, ed. Max H. Fisch (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1951), p. 298.

their power with the Reconstruction and various upheavals in the economy. Most of the aristocrats are well-educated planters or lawyers such as the de Spains and Benbows. Some of the families have an aristocratic origin in Europe such as the Sartorises and Compsons, and others are self made like Henry Sutpen.

With the decline in power of the aristocrats, an ambitious family of poor whites, the Snopeses, appears in Faulkner's world and begins to ease into positions of power. Uneducated but sly they are master exploiters recognizing nothing but getting caught as a sin. By various means they gain access to positions once sacred to the aristocrats, such as the vice-presidency of the bank and the state legislature.

The moral workings of this complex world are so complicated that Faulkner has been often misunderstood, and disagreement among his critics is common, though they seem to have come more in accord with each other in recent years. His early critics seemed to find little in his work but purveyance of horror and cruelty in a talented manner.[1] Later concern with Faulkner's moral views seems to have obtained much of its impetus from George Marion O'Donnell's opening statement in his Faulkner's Mythology, "William

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[1] William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), see Introduction for a summary of early Faulkner criticism.

Faulkner is really a traditional moralist in the best sense of the word."[1] This opinion is in direct contrast to some of the earlier critical expressions, such as A. W. Green's concept that:

> He views all human conduct with a smiling, satirical tolerance----His gods do not either chortle good-humoredly or flash forth their wrath: they smile slightly, and ironically out of the sides of their mouths.[2]

O'Donnell divides Faulkner's world into Sartorises and Snopeses. No matter what their names might be, all the characters fall into these two categories. The Sartorises base their actions on tradition, ". . . they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality, humanism."[3] Correspondingly the Snopeses are motivated only by selfishness; they are capable of doing anything which will further their own ambitions.

> Really, then, they are amoral; they represent naturalism or animalism. And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism.[4]

Malcolm Cowley elaborates on this struggle and how it has brought Faulkner's South into a period, ". . . of

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[1]G. M. O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 49.

[2]A. W. Green, "William Faulkner at Home," Two Decades of Criticism, pp. 45-46.

[3]O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 50.

[4]Ibid.

moral confusion and social decay."[1] The modern descendants of the aristocrats are incapable of combatting the evils which have risen against the old order. They are so badly adapted to modern life that they do not realize the threat posed by the Snopeses and their ilk, or if they do recognize a threat, such as Horace Benbow's awareness of impending injustice in Sanctuary, they are too weak to combat it. Cowley points out Faulkner's love of nature and the land of which he writes and sums up his feeling as a combination of possessive love and fear of destruction. The possessive love rubs off on his characters so that there is a strong quality of family affection and clannishness. Sexual love in comparison comes off not so well, usually emerging as purely selfish lust or as a kind of weapon used by one against another.

With Cowley's essay Robert Penn Warren finds himself in considerable agreement and uses it as a basis for his own essay, William Faulkner. He recapitulates Cowley's ideas, giving additional stress to the downfall of the aristocrats because of the curse of slavery, "which, with the Civil War as instrument, frustrated their design."[2] Warren expresses a need for broadening the critical view of Faulkner

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[1]Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction to the Portable Faulkner," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 74.

[2]Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 85.

so that the idea that he is a provinical concerned only with local problems becomes inadequate.

> The legend is not merely a legend of the South, but it is also a legend of our general plight and problem. The modern world is in moral confusion. It does suffer from a lack of discipline, of sanctions, of community of values, of a sense of a mission.[1]

Warren disagrees with O'Donnell's view that Faulkner is bound to tradition and takes all his values from the old order. He says, ". . . the old order did not satisfy human needs . . . not being founded on justice . . . (it) held the seeds of its own ruin in itself."[2] With the failure of the old order and the selfishness of the new, the important things in life become the human effort and the will to endure. The last part of the essay is a survey of topics which Warren feels need further critical study. Several of them--nature, the poor white, and the Negro--are subjects intimately connected with, or part of, the moral scope of Faulkner's novels and will be treated elsewhere in this study.

In his book, William Faulkner, A Critical Study, Irving Howe is in agreement with Warren that labeling Faulkner a traditional moralist is inadequate because, "the truth is that he writes in opposition to his tradition as well as in acceptance . . ."[3] Faulkner goes back beyond

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[1]Ibid., p. 86. [2]Ibid.

[3]Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 20.

traditional morality to the primal wilderness when men were free of society and its often arbitrary restrictions and the land was held in communal anonymity by the Indians and frontiersmen. This was the state of innocence and virtue. Then men began to change the wilderness, and, "Inescapably, the settling of the wilderness was a violation."[1] Why did man hack down the forests, divide the land into rectangles, and abuse it into eroded infertility? Howe reads from Faulkner that, "the agent of violation is woman."[2] They are the means of propagation of the human race, searching eternally for security: "they contrive to perpetuate the species no matter what dreams or destruction men indulge in."[3]

Wanton and indiscriminate exploitation of nature is man's violation and a myriad of frustrations is the curse which man has suffered in return. These frustrations force man to compromise his freedom, but there is one means of redemption left. Howe terms this means "gesture." The gesture is man's rebellion against the burden of the curse, any act which maintains individual integrity because Faulkner's, "distinctive moral position . . . . is an implicit affirmation of integrity . . . ."[4]

A view similar to Howe's is expressed by H. M.

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[1] Ibid., p. 95.

[2] Ibid., p. 97.

[3] Ibid., p. 99.

[4] Ibid., p. 103.

Campbell and R. E. Foster in their book, William Faulkner, A Critical Appraisal. They see Faulkner as committed to primitivism or "nature as norm." Faulkner sees:

> . . . our civilization in a very unflattering fashion--as a wasteland filled with undersexed or oversexed creatures, a hub of violence, death, meaningless sensation and obsessive greed.[1]

Primitive people leading simple lives do not have these troubles to the overriding degree of modern society because from nature comes "endurance, honesty, courage, physical contact with nature, and tolerant pessimism."[2] The last is the manifestation of a theme which Campbell and Foster find in all of Faulkner's fiction which they call "cosmic pessimism." This theme shows man as victim of a chaotic universe in which virtue is rewarded only by chance. But man still has some measure of free will and may at least retain his self-respect by trying to do the right thing.

Warren marked a sense of doom prevailing in Faulkner's work, and Howe sees the characters making "gestures" in revolt against an indomitable "curse." Along this same line Campbell and Foster have developed their idea of cosmic pessimism. But one cannot help wondering about the accuracy of these concepts since they are diametrically opposed to

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[1]H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 142.

[2]Ibid., p. 146.

some of Mr. Faulkner's recent statements in speeches and articles. One of the most explicit of these statements is contained in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

> I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.[1]

These are not the words of a man who believes in inevitable doom, an indomitable curse, or cosmic pessimism, and these words must have something to do with his writing because his next sentence in the speech is, "The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things."[2]

Other discrepancies have appeared between critical interpretation of Faulkner's work and his own statements of belief. Several critics feel that Faulkner's characters are caught in a web of moral determinism. Malcolm Cowley says:

> . . . not one of them exercises the faculty of conscious choice between good and evil, they are haunted, obsessed, driven forward by some inner necessity.[3]

In the quarterly Faulkner Studies, Henry Nash Smith writes:

> They are never startled or angered by the intrusion of irrational subconscious drives into their scheme

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[1]William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Award Speech," Saturday Review Reader (New York: Bantam Books, 1951), p. 68.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Cowley, "Introduction to the Portable Faulkner," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 76.

> of things, because they are seldom ruled by any other forces.[1]

Speaking at his daughter's junior college commencement, Faulkner again expresses a belief opposed to what the critics find in his work. He says of God's creation of the earth:

> Then he created man completely equipped to cope with the earth, by means of free will and the capacity for decision and the ability to learn by making mistakes . . . and so in time make his own peaceful destiny of the earth.[2]

If the critics have interpreted Mr. Faulkner correctly, then the operation of morality in his novels is not what he sincerely holds as personal belief, or he has recently changed. To discover if any such change has taken place is one of the problems of this study.

In order to be as comprehensive as possible, this investigation will base its conclusions primarily upon analyses of three novels which are comparatively typical of Faulkner's work: Sartoris, The Hamlet, and Intruder in the Dust. The two main criteria in picking the novels were that they cover as wide a variety of Faulkner's important moral problems as possible and that they span most of the time during which Faulkner has been writing.

Sartoris is the first novel about Yoknapatawpha

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[1]H. N. Smith, "William Faulkner and Reality," Faulkner Studies, II, No. 2 (1953), p. 17.

[2]William Faulkner, "Faith or Fear," Atlantic, CXCII, No. 2 (1953), p. 53.

county, and though not as experimental in form and style, it is closely related thematically to The Sound and The Fury and others of the early Yoknapatawpha books. Centered around a family of southern aristocrats, it touches on the poor whites, the Snopeses, the Negroes, and other groups which are important in later novels. The Hamlet concentrates on the bucolic doings of the people living in and around a small rural community. Living in simple honesty and trust, their life flows along smoothly, interrupted only by the periodic visits of the sewing machine salesman bringing the news of the rest of the county. Then they slowly become aware that they are being infiltrated by the Snopes family, a clan of barn burners and unscrupulous schemers. The Hamlet was published in 1940, eleven years after Sartoris.

After The Hamlet, Faulkner's novels became more concerned with the relationship between whites and Negroes in the South, although he had treated the problem before, particularly in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! Slavery and miscegenation are motifs which appear frequently in Faulkner's work, but the modern Negro as a victim of injustice is a fairly recent subject. Intruder in the Dust, the third book chosen for analysis, is about a white boy's efforts to obtain justice for a Negro. He goes through a period of awakening to the Negro as a fellow human and a moral shock when he realizes that the Negro justifiably does

not expect justice at the hands of the whites.

Before attempting to analyze the operation of moral forces in these three novels it is necessary to try to pin down some meaning for "morality", a word which suffers from a highly flexible relativity. By morality is meant a method by which one governs his conduct toward himself, other people, and any deity which he happens to recognize. The terms used for moral value are of course good and evil no matter what form one's moral method may take, and moral forces result from reaction between the two. As Faulkner expresses it in his Nobel Prize speech, ". . . the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing . . ."[1] Morality is the operation of good and evil:

> . . . the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed --- love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.[2]

To formulate the basic values upon which the characters act, a strategic viewpoint must be maintained at all times, realizing that Faulkner is quite capable of making tactical statements which are purposely false in order to achieve a desired effect. With this in mind an attempt will be made to build an over-all view of the moral structure of each important character and the consequences of that

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[1]Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Award Speech," Saturday Review Reader, p. 68.

[2]Ibid.

structure's interaction with the moral structure of other characters.

Morality can be purely personal where it concerns an internal struggle with one's own soul, social where it concerns relationships between people, or something else where it concerns man's relationship to extra-human entities such as nature or a deity. In addition morality can be viewed as individual or with varying degrees of generality. On the individual level, moral sensibilities, basic values, are never exactly the same from one person to the other, and marking the differences becomes vital in explaining interactions. Some values are mutually held by many individuals so that they can be grouped, often in conjuction with some other quality or means of division such as family, race, region, and social class. This study will attempt to apply the above distinctions to Faulkner's characters and their interactions in order to accomplish the task of formulating basic values and discovering any change or development.

CHAPTER II

SARTORIS

In Sartoris Faulkner has constructed a legend of tradition as practiced by a family intimately associated with the growth of the South. The effect on the tradition of a loss of moral direction in the post World War I era is to render it inoperative for the only surviving son of the family. This Chapter will attempt to examine the moral values advocated by the tradition--as manifested by young Bayard's ancestors--young Bayard's relationship to these values, and the comparable values of other groups and individuals associated with the Sartorises.

The Sartoris family came to Mississippi from Carolina where they had been tobacco planters. That the first Sartoris to settle in Carolina was not of ordinary stock is affirmed by one of his descendants who takes from an old chest a rapier which had been his.

> It was just such an implement as a Sartoris would consider the proper equipment for raising tobacco in a virgin wilderness, it and the scarlet heels and the ruffled wristbands in which he broke the earth and fought his stealthy and simple neighbors.[1]

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[1]William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1951), p. 91.

Proud, flamboyant, and reckless, their principal distinction is aptly stated by Horace Benbow, "Funny family, always going to wars, and always getting killed."[1]

This quality is well reflected in the name "Bayard" which the family gives to approximately half of its sons. Three Sartorises carry the name Bayard in this novel. The name comes from a famous noble family of France; the best known was Pierre Terrail Bayard, a sixteenth century knight. For two hundred years before him, almost every head of the family had died in battle, and he obligingly carried on the tradition. He was a great soldier and embodied the very essence of chivalry. Through many wars his bravery and leadership inspired his men to valor, often against forces many times their own strength.[2] In a like manner, the Sartoris men die, if not always in war, at least as a result of some violent course of action which they deliberately pursue. Such actions occurring again and again take on the proportions of tradition, but Faulkner constructs their personalities so that it becomes evident that an important cause of these actions is simple, genetic inheritance of a wild streak. But the particular manifestations which their actions assume are to a great extent the results of conditioning by the tradition.

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[1] Ibid., p. 167.

[2] "Bayard," Encyclopedia Brittanica (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1949), III, p. 328.

The upholding of honor and pride is the Sartoris tradition--in a spectacular manner as often as possible. In a member of the Carolina branch of the family, the tradition exhibited its ultimate champion. The Carolina Bayard's moral values were exceedingly simple because he possessed so few; concerning religion, "he believed too firmly in Providence, as all his actions clearly showed, to have any religious convictions whatever."[1]

This is a very convenient theology for a man of action, for if he believes all his actions have divine guidance he requires no other religion. He needs to know nothing of what any religion claims to be God's decrees upon how man should conduct himself or what to believe, since he already believes that he has divine guidance and thus can do anything. Sartorises had no monopoly on the tradition, and in Jeb Stuart he found a kindred spirit.

> . . . Stuart at thirty and Bayard Sartoris at twenty three stood briefly like two flaming stars garlanded with Fame's burgeoning laurel and the myrtle and roses of Death . . . . And still in a spirit of pure fun: neither Jeb Stuart nor Bayard Sartoris, as their actions clearly showed, had any political convictions involved at all.[2]

The values most cherished by these two Confederate cavalrymen are revealed in the story of Bayard's death. In a raid inspired by a whim, Stuart, Sartoris, and eighteen

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[1]Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 9.

[2]Ibid., p. 10.

others sneak through the Yankee lines and charge General Pope's breakfast table in search of coffee. Along with the coffee they capture a Yankee major and mount him behind one of the raiders. As they head back toward their own lines, the traditional code goes into action. Stuart speaks:

> 'If you will direct us to your nearest cavalry picket, I will provide you with a proper mount,' he offered again.
>
> 'Will General Stuart, cavalry leader and General Lee's eyes, jeopardize his safety, and that of his men and his cause in order to provide for the temporary comfort of a minor prisoner to his sword?' the major said. 'This is not bravery: it is the rashness of a heedless and headstrong boy . . . .'
>
> 'Not for the prisoner, sir,' Stuart replied haughtily, 'but for the officer suffering the fortune of war. No gentleman would do less.'
>
> 'No gentleman has any business in this war,' the major retorted. 'There is no place for him here. He is an anachronism, like anchovies. At least General Stuart did not capture our anchovies,' he added tauntingly . . . .
>
> 'Anchovies,' repeated Bayard Sartoris, who galloped nearby, and he whirled his horse. Stuart shouted at him, but Sartoris lifted his reckless stubborn hand and flashed on . . .[1]

Stuart starts to follow but is stopped by his men. "Let go, Alan," Stuart said. "He is my friend."[2] But he is forced by his men to return to the Confederate lines, and Bayard charges back through the Yankees to die in General Pope's commissary tent, shot in the back.

Upholding the gentleman's code of honor and loyalty to well-loved friend regardless of risk are shown by this story to be basic values which Stuart cherishes more

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[1] Ibid., pp. 16-17. [2] Ibid., p. 17.

highly than the southern cause. Bayard Sartoris is proud of being a gentleman, and if he is, like the anchovies, an anachronism, what better way could exist of vindicating his pride than showing his contempt for the Yankee's words by charging back after the anchovies. Assuming that Stuart and Sartoris are practically moral duplicates, then basic values become the same for both, and the good becomes pride, honor, and loyalty to comrades with little regard for anything else. That Bayard had never been of much use to society is plain because, when the Civil War came along, "the Sartorises were privately a little glad, for now Bayard would have something to do."[1]

John Sartoris, brother to the Bayard who rode with Jeb Stuart, was born in Carolina, went to the Mexican War, and soon after built his plantation four miles from the six year old town of Jefferson, Mississippi. He named his son Bayard, and in 1861 raised a regiment in Yoknapatawpha County which he took to Virginia to fight for Stonewall Jackson. To the family tradition of pride and honor, Colonel John brought love of power and ambition. This demonstrates one of his basic values: he always wanted to command his own situation.

After the war Colonel Sartoris exerted his will to lead in a direct and ruthless manner, though he still adhered to the gentleman's code of honor. When two

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[1]Ibid., p. 10.

carpetbaggers tried to bring some Negroes in to vote, he was the only one there to stop them. After running the Negroes off, he went to the boarding house where the carpetbaggers were staying; as related almost fifty years later by a friend:

> 'He walked right into the room whar they was a-settin' behind a table facin' the do', with their pistols layin' on the table . . . . and in a minute hyer come Cunnel with his hat cocked over his eye, marchin' down steady as a co't jury . . . . 'Madam,' he says, 'I was fo'ced to muss up yo' guest-room right considerable. Pray accept my apologies, and have yo' nigger clean it up and send the bill to me. My apologies again madam, fer havin' been put to the necessity of exterminatin' vermin on yo' premises. Gentlemen,' he says to us, 'good mawnin'.' And he cocked that 'ere beaver on his head and walked out.'[1]

From then on he found it necessary to kill again and again. With a partner he began to build a railroad, and his need to dominate caused him to bully his partner mercilessly until the partner sold out to him. He finished the railroad and ran successfully, against his former partner, for the state legislature. Finally realizing that his bullying had gone too far and that his opponent was no coward, he knew there would be a showdown. " 'And so,' he said, 'Redlaw'll kill me tomorrow, for I shall be unarmed. I'm tired of killing men . . . . Pass the wine, Bayard.' "[2]

Though violent and extremely proud, Colonel Sartoris was a man of vision, and if he was harsh and

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[1] Ibid., p. 236. [2] Ibid., p. 23.

uncompromising, it was what he felt the times demanded of him. To the traditional values of pride, honor, and love of family, he added the love of power and accomplishment. But his ambition was not purely selfish because he quite willingly accepted and cherished the responsibility of leadership along with the power, so long as he was on top. Always flirting with disaster, he had no time for compassion and the weakness which accompanies it. He ruled himself rigidly, killing until his accomplishments were complete, and then when the necessity dwindled, still accepting the responsibility of being a gentleman, he went to his death with that same forthrightness with which he lived.

Sartoris is primarily about young Bayard, a post World War I Southern aristocrat. A contrast is set up between the rigid though self-centered ability of Colonel John (after the Civil War) to direct his activities to a definite end, plus the dedication of all the other past Sartorises to the tradition, and the confused and undirected actions of young Bayard after World War I. It is a story of the decay of Southern aristocracy due to the inability of the tradition to survive in the modern world.

At the beginning of the novel, Bayard has recently suffered a violent shock which has changed his personality. It was brought about by his twin brother's death in aerial combat and sustained by the modern world which has disassociated him from the tradition. Faulkner makes it clear that

John and Bayard enjoyed life with a wild zest during their growing years. Remembering when they became old enough for college, Aunt Jenny says, "I don't know what they kept on fighting folks about after they went away to school, but they found some reason."[1]

Together they went to World War I to fight the Germans in the air over Europe. One day John took off alone in an obsolete plane and headed east. Bayard flew after him and failed to make him turn back, then tried to protect him from German fighters but failed again. As John leaped to his death, he smiled and thumbed his nose at Bayard flying nearby. At this point Bayard lost the aggressive spirit of pure fun which had prevailed over his early life, and he lapsed into a gloomy state which slowly changed him into a fugitive fleeing from his own grief and seeking without direction for a haven. He is directionless because his speeding, modern world of airplanes, fast cars, and delicatessen potato salad offers no substitute for the traditional values lost in the past which gave old Colonel John so much strength after the Southern defeat.

Dominated by grief, young Bayard is little more than a deterministic tool of his own irrationality. He tries to anesthetize his emotions with liquor, but the old Sartoris wildness breaks through, and he is almost killed riding a wild horse. As though ridden by a demon, he drives his auto

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[1]Ibid., p. 355.

recklessly about the county, turns it over in a creek, almost drowns, and winds up in a cast with several broken ribs. But the violent action serves only as a temporary deterrent to his grief, and he goes through a ritual of destroying boyhood mementoes of his brother, trying to exorcise his ghost. An examination of his stock of moral values reveals only a kind of guilty love of his dead brother. He possesses none of the traditional values of pride, ambition, and honor nor the acceptance of responsibility which goes with them. Life has become meaningless, a burden.

> Three score and ten years to drag a stubborn body about the world and cozen its insistent demands. Three score and ten the Bible said. Seventy years. And he was only twenty-six. Not much more than a third through it. Hell.[1]

From such a low point of hopelessness, Faulkner brings Bayard temporarily to the traditional height of an aroused love of the land, the land which his great-grandfather, Colonel John, championed through the Reconstruction. He threw himself into working the land, "and he discovered pride again."[2] But with the completion of the planting, he fell back into his treadmill of irresponsibility. Another temporary diversion was his marriage to Narcissa which he carried out with the usual Sartoris sparsity of feeling toward their women. The vision of his brother's death still dominated his whole existence, and Narcissa would, "lie

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[1] Ibid., p. 160. [2] Ibid., p. 204.

crying quietly in the darkness beside his rigid body, with a ghost between them."[1]

Bayard's story is one of a man continually running away, goaded by his emotions, without regard for pride, honor, and responsibility. Through his own heedless recklessness he brings about his grandfather's death, and to his grief for his brother is added shame and guilt. Where before it had been a mental flight, he now physically runs away. Bayard is a pitiful representative of the once gallantly courageous Sartorises as he tells himself:

> You were afraid to go home. You made a nigger sneak your horse out to you. You, who deliberately do things your judgement tells you may not be successful, even possible, are afraid to face the consequences of your own acts.[2]

He has debased a symbol of Sartoris glory by using the horse for his flight, for it was on a horse that the Carolina Bayard rode back to face the Methodist revival meeting through which he had pursued a fox. The Carolina Bayard was also riding a horse when he charged back through the Yankees to his death, and Colonel John's glory during the Civil War was all accomplished on horseback. Thus Bayard's base use of the horse-symbol echoes and accentuates his debasement of the tradition by fleeing the responsibility of his own acts. Without telling them of his grandfather's death, he finds temporary refuge with the back-country

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[1]Ibid., p. 297. [2]Ibid., p. 311.

McCallum family but runs again when it becomes imminent that they will discover his guilt. His inability to accept responsibility for his own actions drives him all over the world, and he finally runs away from life itself in Dayton, Ohio, on the day his son is born. He deliberately attempts to fly a crackpot's experimental plane which the army regarded as sure death, and the wings tear off in flight.

Violent death is part of the Sartoris tradition--violent death as a result of foolhardy courage--but the tradition demands that death be a kind of supreme climax of Sartoris glory. Bayard's death is ignominious, incurred while running away from his grief and guilt. Previous Sartorises met death on the offensive instead of in retreat from life. The tradition lacked meaning for Bayard because it stood still as the world grew away from it. A son of the age of speed, he speaks of the Civil War with contempt, " 'Little two-bit war,' young Bayard repeated, 'and on a horse. Anybody can go to war on a horse. No chance for him to do much of anything.' "[1]

Aunt Jenny Du Pre, sister to young Bayard's great-grandfather, ministers to the Sartoris men with a soothing hand and a scathing tongue. Although she was continually scolding the Sartoris men for their wildness, she also cherished that wildness and was continually glorifying it in tales of their exploits. Full of compassion, generosity,

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[1] Ibid., p. 230.

and kindness, Aunt Jenny is the most morally good, in the generic sense, of all the Sartoris family and seems to have Faulkner's sympathy. Faulkner's presentation of Aunt Jenny is in agreement with Narcissa's feeling toward Jenny when she could not help:

> . . . admiring more than ever that indomitable spirit that, born with a woman's body into a heritage of rash and heedless men and seemingly for the sole purpose of cherishing those men to their early and violent ends . . . . how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foes no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it.[1]

It should be noted that this is not only praise of the unsung women but also an indictment of the men and their tradition. Although the tradition may have once stood strong, its gallantry was really only, "fustian and useless glamour . . ."

Although Narcissa admires Aunt Jenny's indomitable steadfastness, she does not envy her position of never knowing what her men will do next. Daughter of an aristocratic family, Narcissa Benbow is repeatedly thrown off balance by conflicting emotions within herself. A desire to live in a state of cocoonlike serenity protected from all that is unpleasant controls most of her actions. She sees her life as a pool of tranquility upon which no ripple must pass and if violated by even the possibility of a ripple she becomes greatly upset. And yet, she is fascinated by some of the

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[1]Ibid., pp. 357-8.

things which disturb her most. Like a rabbit hypnotized by a snake, she is attracted by violence and obscenity. A series of obscene letters from an unknown admirer thoroughly revolts her, but she refuses to destroy them and reads them over and over until their writer finally steals the letters from her room.

Repeatedly, Narcissa voices the repulsion she feels for the wild violence of the Sartorises. When she sees a cat kill a bird, " 'Oh-h-h, damn you!' she cried. 'Damn you! You--you Sartoris!' "[1] But she is nevertheless attracted to Bayard, and when he breaks his ribs as a result of turning his car over and having paid practically no attention to Narcissa during her repeated visits, suddenly, " 'You beast, you beast,' she cried thinly, "why must you always do these things where I've got to see you?' "[2] Bayard, of course, has no idea what she is talking about. Narcissa's statement is typical of her inability to understand herself; if she were not attracted to Bayard's violence, it could not hurt her. But she usually interprets other people's actions only as they affect her. When she discovers that her brother, Horace, is having an affair with a neighbor woman she is not merely shocked at his violation of social mores but takes it as a personal sin against herself. " 'I wouldn't have treated Horace that way,' she wailed."[3] To

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[1] Ibid., p. 75. [2] Ibid., p. 218.

[3] Ibid., p. 202.

Narcissa, evil is that which disturbs her tranquillity and the good that which sustains it. That which sustains it is usually close adherence to convention, but she repeatedly scuttles this scheme of values because of an ambiguous fascination for the very things which she hates. Knowing full well she cannot change Bayard's penchant for self destruction, she proceeds to marry him anyway.

Narcissa's self-centered system of values is held also by Mrs. Compson in The Sound and The Fury, published immediately after Sartoris. Mrs. Compson tends to evaluate the actions of her family as deliberately designed to flout and disturb her--the important thing is always what she believes is their intentions toward her. Even if an action involves her in only the most indirect manner, she takes the consequences quite personally. In Sanctuary, published two years after Sartoris, Narcissa appears again with the same values become more obvious. She has lost all sense of compassion and given way to her obsession for the conventional to the point where respectability has become the prime value of her life. When her brother tries to help the destitute mistress and sick child of a man wrongfully accused of murder, Narcissa is adamant against allowing her brother to bring, " 'A street-walker, a murderess, into the house where I was born,' "[1]--a house she hadn't lived in

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[1]William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: The New American Library, 1950), p. 68.

for years. And later she says, " 'But I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about.' "[1] In the short story, There Was a Queen, the consequences of Narcissa's moral hypocrisy are complete when she prostitutes herself to get back the packet of obscene letters which Byron Snopes had written her twelve years before. It becomes evident in this story that Narcissa does not actually care for real respectability but for the world's belief in her respectability--a false front. She says of her acquisition of the letters--a price any conventionally respectable woman would consider shamefully unpayable:

> That was the only way I could do it. But I would have done more than that. So I got them. And now they are burned up. Nobody will ever see them.[2]

As many commentators have said, there is an interweaving and extension of themes and characters through Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha works, so that a broader look often helps to enhance the understanding of any one work. Such is the case with Narcissa Benbow. The subsequent deterioration of her morality in Sanctuary and There Was a Queen helps to clarify the nature of her values in Sartoris so that her self-centeredness becomes more apparent and significant during the period covered by Sartoris in which she was still

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[1] Ibid., p. 108.

[2] William Faulkner, "There Was a Queen," Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 741.

capable of some compassion and sympathy.

If the Sartoris men exemplify pointless action, then the antithesis of them is Horace Benbow, a man of intellect who is deeply concerned with moral issues but too weak to accomplish much of value. About him there is an "air of fine and delicate futility . . ."[1] Usually quite unaware of what is going on in the world, he floats around enraptured by the latest product of his glass blowing set or abjectly submits to a brow-beating by his sister. When the voluptuous Belle Mitchell, one of the extremely sensual women who appear frequently in Faulkner's novels, turns the powerful weapon of her body upon Horace, he succumbs completely, though his moral sensitivity is agonized by the knowledge that he is breaking up Belle's home. His general weakness is played upon in Sanctuary by all those with whom he comes in contact. He is flouted and betrayed by his sister, patronized by Belle, and bullied by everyone. Even the man he is trying to defend against injustice ignores him. Faulkner seems to be saying that a moral sensibility is of little use if possessed by a creature incapable of acting effectively. The reporter in Pylon and Hightower in Light in August have many of Horace's characteristics. Confused by the world and their own emotions, they are nevertheless compassionate and suffer moral anguish over the evil and injustice which they detect about them. But

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[1]Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 161.

whenever they attempt to act against these forces miserable failure results.

A contrast to both the aristocratic heedlessness of the Sartorises and the intellectual futility of Horace Benbow is the MacCallum family, the good and simple people of the land. They live not just on the land but with it so that they know all its secrets. Farmers and hunters, one brother says of the youngest, Buddy, " 'He'd spend his whole life in that 'ere river bottom, with a hunk of cold cawn bread to eat and a passel of dawgs fer comp'ny.' "[1] As they cherish the land, they cherish each other with a strong sense of family responsibility. Generous and kind, they ask nothing from other men but respect and friendship, so that when Bayard is in the deepest of his despair he turns to them knowing that with them he may find some peace. A year after Sartoris, Faulkner published As I Lay Dying about a family, the Bundrens, with the same naive dignity as the MacCallums. With indomitable strength they carry out their purposes against huge odds with such nonchalance that the anguished thrashings of the Sartorises, Benbow's, and Compson's seem slightly ridiculous.

Faulkner frequently sets his country people on a kind of epic journey during which they conquer tremendous hardships and finally come to success. The Bundrens carry Addie's body through fire, flood, and buzzards to bury her

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[1] Ibid., p. 330.

in Jefferson. In The Old Man the tall convict passes through almost insurmountable trials and finally gets back to the prison where he felt at home. Lena Grove of Light in August also travels a long road and demonstrates the strength of simplicity.

Old Will Falls, another of the poor whites, figures in a piece of humorous satire which Faulkner has worked into Sartoris. He has formulated what seems to be an allegorical joke in which progressive science, thoroughly convinced that it has the only valid answers, disavows all responsibility unless allowed to amputate a small growth from old Bayard's cheek. Reactionary, primitive intuition draws from the ancient wisdom of mankind, and completely disregarding the hysteria of technology, proceeds to unqualified success without ever doubting itself. The young doctor is completely sincere in his belief that medical school has taught him the truth, but the old doctor, Loosh Peabody, knows from years of experience that truth is much deeper than the words in a textbook. Old Will Falls knows the truth which was handed down from the old Choctaw woman 130 years in the obscure past of the frontier. It is not a truth which can be expressed in medical language but involves a complex of things including the ritual of burning the cloth with which he wipes away the excess ointment.

One might well consider old Bayard as symbolic of the whole South, the growth on his face as the South's

troubles, and Doc Peabody as common sense which looks before it leaps. Dr. Alford is the sincere but hysterical voice of modern science while the Memphis doctor lacks even sincerity and appears as only absurd self-importance. Faulkner seems to be saying that the South can solve at least some of its problems by no more than looking into its own heritage where it will find someone like Will Falls, the good and simple man of the land, who possesses a curative, ancient truth. Perhaps this truth will not only cure the problem but leave the South better off than it was before, as when the growth fell off on the day predicted by Will Falls, "leaving on old Bayard's withered but unblemished cheek a round spot of skin rosy and fair as any baby's."[1]

Faulkner introduces the Snopes tribe in Sartoris, giving a brief history of how they have infiltrated Jefferson. Through a process of tenacious concentration, they have wormed their way into the commercial life of the town to the point where:

> . . . to old Bayard's profane astonishment and unconcealed annoyance he (Flem Snopes) became vice-president of the Sartoris bank, where already a relation of his was a bookkeeper.[2]

The bookkeeper Snope's panicky desire for Narcissa Benbow exhibits the usual Snopes aspiration for something beyond his immediate reach. To say that the Snopeses are completely evil is absurd, but they are certainly gifted with

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[1]Ibid., p. 240. [2]Ibid., p. 172.

a very efficient--both brazen and furtive as necessity demands--type of avarice.

The Negroes in Sartoris are treated by Faulkner with much the same benevolent condescension that they receive from the aristocratic Sartorises. Simon, the old reprobate, is the most important Negro in the story, functioning primarily as a kind of a court jester for the Sartorises. Faulkner describes Simon when told to get to work:

> Simon groaned dismally, and spent a half minute laying the file aside. He laid it on a step, then he picked it up and moved it to another step. Then he laid it against the step behind him. He ran his thumb along the blade examining it with morose hopefulness.[1]

All of the Negroes contribute strong humor to the novel but little else, least of all manifestations of intelligence. They are little more than a minstrel show performing on the same stage as the white tragedy. But despite Simon's dishonesty and Caspey's lies, both laughable, Faulkner makes it clear that they are loyal, kind, and generous. Caspey's short rebellion is easily put down by old Bayard's aristocratically righteous act of knocking him out the door with a stick of stove wood. As with the poor whites, Faulkner presents the simplicity of the Negroes as a source of strength. Despite extreme poverty a family of hill Negroes with whom young Bayard spends Christmas are very happy with

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[1]Ibid., p. 51.

what little they have while their guest, possessor of wealth and position, is in the depths of despair.

In trying to make comprehensive conclusions about the moral scheme of Sartoris, it is helpful to examine the conclusions of some of Faulkner's critics. George Marion O'Donnell says that in Faulkner's myth of the South the Sartoris family represents "vital morality humanism."[1] It is impossible, however, to find any convincing evidence in Sartoris to support this conclusion and a re-examination of the family refutes it. The first Sartoris to settle in Carolina, a swashbuckling dandy, subdued the wilderness with scarlet heels, ruffled wristband, and a rapier. One of his descendants, the Carolina Bayard Sartoris, held no religious or political convictions and went to the Civil War in a spirit of pure fun. Upholding the gentleman's code of honorable behavior was more important to him than the Southern cause. Colonel John Sartoris was extremely proud and often ruthless in pursuit of his hard-driving ambitions. He added only a love of power to the Sartoris tradition. Young Bayard, the most recent of the Sartorises, has gone over to the modern world of speed and irresponsibility so that his brother's death has cut him adrift from the tradition of pride and honor. Finally, with the death of his grandfather

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[1]George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 50.

he has disintegrated into a tormented fugitive from his own grief and guilt. In the Sartoris tradition of pride and glorious honor, the most important goal seems to be a glamorous death. The Sartoris' swashbuckling spirit of pure fun is a long way from acting with "an ethically responsible will,"[1] as O'Donnell puts it.

Irving Howe sees young Bayard returning from the war in search of a way of life:

> Somewhere, to be sure, there is a tradition for Bayard Sartoris to retrieve, but the point of Sartoris even if not quite the intended point, is that the chaos of his family is hardly the place to look for it.[2]

This view can hardly be credited because what Mr. Howe terms "the chaos of his family," is itself the tradition. Faulkner seems to be saying that here is the tradition, but it is inadequate. Once a source of strength, reaching its high point in Colonel John, the tradition decayed because it was especially adapted to the "glamorous and old disastrous days,"[3] of which the old chest of family mementoes in the attic is the final witness. That the tradition lacked a basis in compassion, generosity, and the other virtues which are concerned with man's desire to aid his fellows is clear from the terms Faulkner chooses throughout the book to describe the Sartorises and their

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[1]Ibid., p. 50.

[2]Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 32.

[3]Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 90.

actions:

> . . . heedless and reckless . . .[1]
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> . . . useless vainglory . . .[2]
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> . . . glamorous and useless striving . . .[3]
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> . . . fustian and useless glamour . . .[4]
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> . . . humorless and fustian vainglory . . .[5]

Although Faulkner indicts the tradition in Sartoris for its lack of moral strength, he finds in it a fascinating kind of beauty--a pointless but very colorful violence. It encourages a selfish indulgence in wild action. Aunt Jenny's embellishments of the legend which she frequently tells about the Carolina Bayard's death evokes from Faulkner words which are both sentimental and contemptuous toward the tradition.

> What had been a hare-brained prank of two heedless and reckless boys wild with their own youth had become a gallant and finely tragical focal point to which the history of the race had been raised from out the old miasmic swamps of spiritual sloth by two angels valiantly fallen and strayed, altering the course of human events and purging the souls of men.[6]

On any casuistic scale which Faulkner might set up, the Sartoris tradition would rank low in moral good but high in a kind of esthetic appeal. His attitude is reflected in a conversation in the novel between Colonel John and Aunt Jenny concerning the legend of the Carolina Bayard.

'That was the goddamnedest army the world

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[1] Ibid., p. 9.
[2] Ibid., p. 43.
[3] Ibid., p. 223.
[4] Ibid., p. 358.
[5] Ibid., p. 374.
[6] Ibid., p. 9.

> ever saw, I reckon,' he said.
> 'Yes,' Aunt Jenny agreed. 'And Bayard was the goddamnedest man in it.'[1]

Faulkner is, in Sartoris, saying the same thing about the whole family.

The overwhelming feeling of despair in Sartoris is in agreement with the general theme of cosmic pessimism which H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster find throughout Faulkner's work. Faulkner's answer to the psychological question of the origin of good and evil is that man is dominated largely by irrational forces which drive him as often as not to unhappiness and destruction. Throughout Sartoris, The Sound and The Fury, and Sanctuary, compassion and justice are to be found only sparsely, and the main characters live in a maelstrom of moral confusion. The cosmic pessimism is voiced in Sartoris as young Bayard accuses an unnamed deity, "You did it! You caused it all; You killed Johnny."[2] At the end of the novel, Faulkner offers some cosmic speculation

> But the Player, and the game he plays . . . He must have a name for His pawns, though. But perhaps Sartoris is the game itself--a game outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late and to an old dead pattern and of which the Player Himself is a little wearied.[3]

With its emphasis on extreme pride and a formalized code of honor, and its lack of compassion, the tradition

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[1]Ibid., p. 18. [2]Ibid., p. 323.

[3]Ibid., p. 380.

elicits Faulkner's disapproval. But even though it lacked a love of humanity, Faulkner seems to admire its complete acceptance of responsibility for its own acts and the strength with which its adherents were able to live. Young Bayard with the same wild streak as his ancestors--a talent for swashbuckling common to many Southern aristocrats which came in handy in the days when the wilderness was being settled--lacks any guiding basis for his life, even the faulty basis of the tradition. As a consequence, he is practically devoid of all moral virtues. Though not consciously cruel, he is completely irresponsible, never thinking of the people about him and the possible results of his actions upon them. Fostered by the modern world, his indirection brings him only death without even the glory with which all his ancestors died. And he is even robbed of the chance for the type of posthumously acquired glory which Aunt Jenny manufactured for his ancestors, because Narcissa, the link with the future, has repudiated the family's violent recklessness.

CHAPTER III

THE HAMLET

In Sartoris young Bayard's relationship to the people about him concerned him very little. As with the other Sartorises, he was not interested in the moral problems of others. The various moral struggles of the novel are mostly within the characters' own personalities and tend to stress the lack of communication and isolation of the individual. A more intense development of this theme appeared in Light in August, but eight years later Faulkner stressed a more social plane in The Hamlet. Instead of the inner turmoil of a soul, the interactions of people in a community make up the bulk of moral interest.

Permeated with humor ranging from the wildly hilarious spotted horse auction to the tender story of Houston's inverted courtship, The Hamlet is unified by a continuous series of reactions, many humorous, between differing moral codes and sensibilities. Since they have lived in the county for years, the Snopeses are not outlanders, but they are new to Frenchman's Bend and quickly begin to make themselves felt as a force of a variety before unknown. How the Snopes family disrupts the bucolic tranquility of the little town and

proceeds to capitalize on the vast difference between their own moral attitudes and those of the townspeople is the central thread of action in the story, although there are many digressions, some devoted to the Snopeses and others to the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend.

Faulkner carefully constructs Frenchman's Bend with a store, cotton gin, mill, blacksmith shop, schoolhouse, church, livery barn, three dozen houses, and Mrs. Littlejohn's boarding hotel. The town and area about it is populated with highly independent farmers and tradesmen who face Will Varner, their headman and purveyor of law, with the attitude of, "What do you think you would like for me to do if you was able to make me do it."[1] Anglo-saxons, Protestants, and Democrats, they live much like their forefathers--so trustworthy that the store could be unattended much of the time and the customers:

> . . . would enter and serve themselves and each other, putting the price of the articles, which they knew to a penny as well as Jody himself did, into a cigar box inside the circular wire cage which protected the cheese . . .[2]

In situations founded on trust, the people are generally very honest, but in situations where mistrust is traditional--almost demanded by the tradition--they seldom give any quarter. A man with the right to enter his neighbors

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[1]William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 5.

[2]Ibid., p. 29.

barn and borrow anything he needs will keep strict account of what he borrows, but trading horses with the same neighbor, he will go to any lengths to bilk the other, and they both know it. Their rigid independence allows little respect for governments and laws as such, because they consider themselves entirely capable of deciding what is right and wrong. The general consensus that the manufacture of corn whiskey for self and friends is one of man's finer talents and none of the government's business makes the enforcement of federal alcohol tax laws next to impossible in the vicinity of Frenchman's Bend. Despite the general lack of education in the area, there is an abundance of shrewd wit and intelligence, and with their intimate knowledge of the land and nature, there is also sensitivity to beauty. Speaking of mocking birds:

> 'You can hear them along Whiteleaf every night,' the first man said. 'I heard one in February. In that snow. Singing in a gum.'
> 'Gum is the first tree to put out,' the third said. 'That was why. It made it feel like singing, fixing to put out that way. That was why it taken a gum.'[1]

Faulkner's characterization is so thorough that one cannot choose a "typical" member of the community because they are all very individual, but many typical qualities may be found in Houston, a farmer. His story is that of a courtship, or rather a kind of inverted process by which Lucy Pate drew him like an animal to the trap, "knowing

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[1]Ibid., p. 317.

it to be a trap, not comprehending why it was doomed but knowing it was, and not afraid now--and not quite wild."[1] With a tremendous love of freedom and independence, Houston started to school at fourteen and immediately rejected the regimentation by refusing to learn and thus began his contest with Lucy.

Five years younger and one year ahead in school, she did her best to get him through school, first by supplying him with examination answers which he instantly destroyed and later by substituting a completed examination for the blank set of papers he always submitted, whereupon he left home. "He fled not from his past, but to escape his future. It took him twelve years to learn you cannot escape either of them."[2] This phrase rather nicely sums up the determinism which often rules Faulkner's characters, as very few of them ever seem to escape from the web of time in which he entangles them. Despite having complete freedom as one of his basic values, the old inexorable power of woman over man draws Houston back to marry her.

Besides his stubborness, independence, and inability to defeat a woman he is like the other men of the area in his capability for compassion, as exhibited by his kindness to the idiot, Ike Snopes, first, by giving him money and later, the token sale of the troublesome cow.

Though not an aristocrat like the Sartorises, Will

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[1] Ibid., p. 246. [2] Ibid., p. 242.

Varner occupies a position of benevolent but immense power over his neighbors since he exercises almost complete economic control over all the important land and business of the area. He is also veterinarian, Justice of the Peace, election commissioner, and general leader of the village. ". . . a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box."[1] Despite his iron control of local finance, Varner is well liked because he confines his conniving to the manner allowed by custom and takes plenty of time to enjoy life. Jody, his son and business manager, possesses enough of his father's acumen to handle the ordinary people of the area, but occupying a prized position, he is the first to fall under the unbeatable advance of the Snopes family. That the Varners have accumulated their wealth largely through shady manipulations and that Jody is prepared to cheat Ab Snopes out of a year's work through blackmail makes his subsequent downfall more retributive than unjust.

When Ab Snopes agrees to farm Varner land and Jody discovers that Ab is on the move from burning down someone's barn, Jody, with the knowledge of his father, decides to let Ab stay and work the land. When settling up time comes, Jody intends to confront Ab with knowledge of the barn burning and refuse to pay for his crop. But Jody becomes panicky when he finds out that even after being accused previously of burning down a barn, Ab had not hesitated to burn down

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[1] Ibid., p. 5.

another and would surely burn down another if pushed. Trying to insure the safety of his barns, Jody enlists Flem Snopes' aid in keeping the fire from Ab's hand, and as payment he gives Flem a job in the store. Thus Jody seals his own doom.

The Varner's moral code allows them to acquire their wealth by almost any means available, but they do have reservations. They usually allow their victims to retain the minimum necessary for existence and are inclined to respect the traditions of the wealthy having some responsibility to the poor--after thoroughly skinning them of course. The reservations that they are willing to make mark a big difference between the Varners and the Snopeses, or at least some of the Snopes family who are willing to do anything by which they may profit--without reservations.

In sharp contrast to the grasping of the Varners, is the generosity and goodwill of Ratliff, the sewing machine agent who travels through the county bearing news and gossip to the back-country villages. Faulkner's creation of Ratliff with a strong moral sensibility and ability to think rationally, two faculties which he rarely combines, allows Ratliff to pursue probably the most morally good (by most reader's standards) course of action of any Faulknerian protagonist. A trader in anything tradeable, business to Ratliff is more a social function than a method of gaining wealth--usually a means by which one man may communicate with another to

their mutual gratification. Long time acquaintance of Ab Snopes, he seems to be the only man in the world with some semblance of friendship with the old barn burner and goes out of his way to be kind to Ab because, " 'Old man Ab aint naturally mean. He's just soured.' "[1]

In his frequent acts of kindness, Ratliff exhibits an active compassion far superior to the confused and ineffective fumblings of some of Faulkner's other characters who are concerned with moral problems, such as Hightower and Horace Benbow. Ratliff does not hesitate to accept responsibility for problems of other people as exemplified by his concern for the idiot, Ike Snopes. To Mrs. Littlejohn he give money for Ike, which she uses to buy the cow with which Ike has fallen in love. When he discovers that the loafers around the store are enjoying a peep show of Ike's sodomy with the cow, he boards up the hole in the barn and vows to stop the whole thing. The line followed by most of Faulkner's morally good characters when faced with a moral problem is to enter into a long debate with themselves or another character, often lasting for pages, on the metaphysical, ethical, and historical ramifications of the problem. But Ratliff is much more the man of action, requiring no elaborate reasoning. He says about Ike and the cow:

> '. . . The reason I aint going to leave him have what he does have is simply because I am strong

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[1]Ibid., p. 32.

> enough to keep him from it. I am stronger than him. Not righter. Not any better, maybe. But just stronger.'[1]

That Ratliff compounded a minor swindle in the deal with Flem Snopes for fifty goats is true, but his object was the besting of Flem rather than the profit, which he immediately gave away to Mrs. Littlejohn for the idiot, Ike. In this hilariously complicated episode, Ratliff draws on his knowledge of the Snopes family to play one against the other. To buy some goats, Ratliff presents a note to which Mink Snopes, a poor relative of Flem, has signed Flem's name. Ratliff relishes the fact that Flem must pay the twenty dollar note or face having his barn burnt down by his own relative. But Ratliff's triumph is considerably dampened when he tries to collect another note for ten dollars, which because of the peculiar makeup of the Snopes family, Ratliff allows Flem to destroy rather than compound the thievery which spawned it.

The skirmish with Flem is interesting morally because it exhibits some of the cardinal differences in the moral makeup of probably the two most important characters in the novel. Morally, Flem is essentially unemotional and pragmatic while Ratliff conceives the deal in anticipation of emotional satisfaction and proceeds to the impractical act of destroying a ten dollar note from a sense of moral responsibility.

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[1] Ibid., p. 227.

It has been the tendency among Faulkner's critics to treat the Snopes family as a kind of homogeneous unit to which may be applied such terms as "amoral,"[1] unscrupulous,"[2] and "codeless,"[3] without much effort to examine them as individuals. Such an examination reveals that the above terms are not well chosen, and the family is far from being a homogeneous unit. The moral constitutions of Ab and Mink are quite different from those of Flem, Lump, and I. O. Even more different is Eck, the blacksmith.

In explaining to the men on the veranda of the store why Ab "aint naturally mean," Ratliff reveals that as a young man, Ab was quite reasonable and friendly, if somewhat untrustworthy. Ratliff mentions Ab's horse and mule trading stint with Rosa Millard of the Sartoris family, which appears in detail in The Unvanquished, and how Ab was tied up and beaten by Bayard Sartoris after Miss Rosa's murder by Major Grumby. Being beaten and forced to hide from the Sartorises worked changes in Ab, but Ratliff relates Ab's defeat in a horse trade with Pat Stamper, a kind of world-champion horse trader, as the final blow which turned Ab

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[1]G. M. O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 50.

[2]Cowley, "Introduction to the Portable Faulkner," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 74.

[3]Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 85.

bitter. At the time of the trade, Ratliff knew Ab well, and he represents him as a man of some principle.

> 'And Ab wasn't trying to beat Pat bad. He just wanted to recover that eight dollars worth of the honor and pride of Yoknapatawpha County horse-trading, doing it not for profit but for honor.'[1]

As a result of this defeat and other reverses, Ab became dedicated to a kind of perverse integrity, which has not only a definite and precise code behind it, but one which Ab adheres to with a fanatic intensity. Ab is not interested in expediency, in which case he would try to avoid trouble. In the story, Barn Burning, Ab vengefully burnt down Harris's barn because Harris forced him to pay a dollar pound fee for a stray hog.[2] The burning of Major de Spain's barn is recounted identically in Barn Burning and The Hamlet. The Major forces Ab to wash a valuable rug upon which he, Ab, has tracked manure, and Ab proceeds deliberately to ruin the rug. When the Major decides to take twenty bushels of corn in payment, and the court upholds him but lowers the penalty to ten bushels, one twentieth of the rug's value, Ab goes home and burn's down de Spain's barn.

In a sense Ab is devoted to a sort of anarchic freedom with the main premise: if any man succeeds in forcing me to perform any act, I will make him regret it. With little regard for the consequences, Ab acts to uphold his

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[1]Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 41.

[2]William Faulkner, "Barnburning," Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 4.

integrity.

In his moral constitution, Mink Snopes is almost a carbon copy of his uncle, Ab. He starts out as a young man on a hopeful search for the sea but before reaching it falls under the spell of a woman of formidable sexual appetite. Casting off the belief willed to him by generations that "there was reserved one virgin, at least for him to marry," he resigns himself to a bitter life of jealousy because when he approached his wife, "he would have to tear aside not garments alone but the ghostly embraces of thirty or forty men."[1] Just as Ab burnt down the barn of a man who impounded his hog, Mink vows revenge on Houston for impounding his cattle and proceeds to murder him from ambush. Mink is an adherent to the same brand of integrity as Ab and inclined to go even to the ultimate act of murder in vindication of it. The term "codeless" certainly does not apply to these two Snopeses. The code is well defined even though sharply different from that of their neighbors, and the results of friction between the two codes are two burnt barns, a ruined rug, a murdered man, and endless trouble for everyone concerned.

Quite different from the code of Ab and Mink is the behavior of Flem. Totally indifferent to integrity, honor, or any other such nebulous and non-utile values, Flem never acts from love, hate, amusement, or the other

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[1]Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 272.

common emotions. The acquisition of power and property is the basic goal of all of Flem's actions. Even the possession of power is, in itself, not too important; Flem does not revel in the exercise of the power he does acquire but uses it merely for the gathering of more property. The power of leadership he does not value at all; instead, he continually seeks economic power because it is useful. Perhaps the most striking thing about Flem is his never ending success, a success which Faulkner makes completely believable by endowing Flem with an unchanging singleness of purpose. As one of his relatives frequently states, " 'By God, you cant beat him.' "[1] Flem is the most completely rational figure in the story, not because he controls his emotions but because he lacks all emotions as commonly defined, except those unseen ones that drive him on his quest for wealth. He is coldly rational, and because he is completely devoid of compassion, he has no sense of moral responsibility. Any object is cherished only insofar as it may be exploited, and thus Flem is evil not from passion or a love of evil but from a moral deficiency.

Faulkner suggests, because of its simplicity and strength, that Flem's brand of evil is the worst kind possible by interjecting into the middle of the book a humorous fantasy in which Flem defeats the devil. The Prince, an old type, passionate devil who enjoys frying "authentic

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[1] Ibid., p. 363.

Christians,"[1] finds that his attendants have misplaced Flem's soul which was taken in on the standard deal that it would be returned to him when he came to begin his eternal torment. Because the Prince has defaulted, Flem proceeds to take possession of all Hell.

Despite the humor with which Faulkner treats Flem, he slowly takes on a kind of looming monstrosity as he shrewdly manipulates himself into a position of power and wealth and brings more and more of his relatives in to prey upon the community. He does not help his relatives from a sense of duty but because they are useful to him. When Mink commits murder, Flem refuses to help him--even though a smart lawyer could probably win for Mink--because Mink is more of a liability than an asset. Flem does not hate Mink for coercing him. Getting rid of Mink is just practical economics.

> 'Because Flem Snopes has got to cancel all them loose-flying notes that turns up here and there every now and then. He's going to discharge at least some of the notes for good and all.'[2]

The term amoral should not be applied to Flem even though he takes advantage of the code of the community and exploits it. It is quite evident that Faulkner intends Flem to be accepted as evil and therefore immoral. His actions are knowingly contrary to the community's moral law. The Idiot, Ike Snopes, is amoral--moral law does not apply to

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[1] Ibid., p. 174. [2] Ibid., p. 366.

him because he is an idiot and does not even know it exists. But Flem is intelligent enough to not only know what the moral code of the community is but also knows how to exploit it. Certainly Flem gives no allegiance to the moral code of any man or group of men, but this does not make him amoral. If one says that a moral person is one who lives according to a moral code and an amoral person lives not according to a moral code then there is no meaning left for the word immoral. At least for the purposes of this study, a distinction must be made between immoral and amoral because they are both cases of living not according to a moral code. Amorality, then, is living in ignorance of a moral code and immorality is living in knowing opposition to a moral code. Thus, Ab Snopes is immoral in the eyes of Major de Spain because he burns down barns for revenge, and the law is immoral to Ab because it can force him to pay a debt he did not willingly incur. Flem Snopes is more generally immoral because he knowingly violates that portion of the community's sensibility which demands that all men have a responsibility to show some measure of compassion to their fellows. Flem feels no qualms about swindling Mrs. Armstid out of her last five dollars--money which the Texan tried chivalrously to return to her in his disgust with her husband's brutality.

In sharp contrast to the rest of the family is Eckrum Snopes who adds further variance to their heterogeneous makeup. Aside from his obvious slowness of mind and

body, Eck is no match for the other Snopeses because he is honest, even generous. In one of his numerous shady deals, Flem finds it expedient to have Eck fill the role of blacksmith without regard to Eck's total lack of experience. The startling thing is that Eck actually works hard and acquires a small amount of skill. Later Eck shows both his generosity and stupidity by letting his loquacious relative, I. O., talk him into paying twice his proper share of a family debt. Eck also reveals a sense of honesty when he refuses to perjure himself after his cousin Lump's example at the trial over the wild horses, and then accepts responsibility for the actions of a wild horse given to him at the auction but which had escaped before he ever laid hands on it. " 'I'm sorry it made Tull's mules snatch him outen the wagon. How much do I owe him?' "[1] Honest, generous, and honorable, Eckrum Snopes shows that Faulkner does not intend the Snopes name to be completely a symbol of evil.

The analysis of this novel has thus far covered the moral implications of the economic situation of Frenchman's Bend mainly because the importance of the Snopeses is their various moral effects upon the community through economic manipulations.

Another theme common to many of Faulkner's books is the sexual power which women exercise over men--a power which men usually cannot resist though it usually makes them

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[1] Ibid., p. 377.

unhappy. In Sartoris and Sanctuary is Belle Mitchell's domination of Horace Benbow, and in Light in August is Lena Grove's spell over Byron Bunch and Bobbie Allen's power over Joe Christmas. In The Hamlet Faulkner uses several versions of the same theme. Mink Snopes, continually faced with "the cuckolding shades" which haunted him, was in a sense a prisoner of sex, "It's like drink. It's like dope to me."[1] A satirical twist of the same pattern has Ike Snopes, the idiot, pursuing Houston's cow, "the flowing immemorial female."[2] Using a mock-heroic style--a low subject treated in a grand manner--Faulkner sends the idiot through the trials of the courtly lover as he is continually tantalized and cruelly rejected:

> She ran faster than he could; trotting, moaning, he watched the vain stippling of leaf-shadows as they fled across the intact and escaping shape of love . . .[3]

In the typical role of the abused suitor, the Idiot braves the charge of a crazed horse trying to save the cow from a pasture fire and as reward receives, "the violent relaxing of her fear constricted bowels."[4]

Sex in its ultimate distillation is embodied in Eula Varner who is less a human being than a collection of everything necessary to drive men mad. " 'She's just like a dog! Soon as she passes anything in long pants she begins

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[1] Ibid., p. 254.
[2] Ibid., p. 189.
[3] Ibid., p. 190.
[4] Ibid., p. 198.

to give off something. You can smell it! You can smell it ten feet away!' "[1] Faulkner heightens this effect by making her first and most abject victim a man of intense will-power, Labove, the schoolteacher who struggled his way from a back-country cabin to a college education. And Eula's crowning irony is that she does not deliberately entice. The torture which her admirers endure is a product of their own lust which she never deliberately inflames. Faulkner does not treat her as a human being, as a character with a personality, but as a symbol of:

> . . . the dream and wish of all male under sun capable of harm--the young who only dreamed yet of the ruins they were still incapable of; the sick and the maimed sweating in sleepless beds, impotent for the harm they willed to do; the old, now--glandless earth-creeping . . .[2]

Sex seems to be, to Faulkner, a symbol of man's basic irrationality, of man's inability to control his own destiny even when presented with the opportunity. For the teacher, Labove, who tenaciously fought his way up from ignorance, to be completely demoralized by an eleven year old girl to the point where his accomplishments lose all value to him is folly, but a kind of folly which he shares with Mink Snopes who was ensnared by a much different type of woman, and with most of the rest of malekind who to some degree find themselves unable to resist the power of sex. This subservience to sex is a betrayal of man's claims to

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[1] Ibid., p. 112. [2] Ibid., p. 169.

rationality, but it is a weakness which is shared by most men, even Ike Snopes, the idiot who is incapable of even making a claim to rationality. With this in mind, Faulkner compounds one of the strongest ironies in the book by uniting in marriage Eula Varner, the symbol of lush femaleness, with Flem Snopes, the coldly rational devotee of economic expediency. A man without passion, the marriage means nothing more to him than another deal by which he will turn a profit. But Ratliff reflects that Eula, a "mortal natural enemy of the masculine race," would at least not be making some normally passionate man suffer.

If morality means the method by which one governs his conduct toward himself, his deity, and other people, the moral action of The Hamlet may be said to be restricted largely to the last of these three varieties. There is little of the internal conflict exhibited by Bayard Sartoris or Joe Christmas of other novels, nor are there many intimations of God. One of the few references to a deity is interesting because it shows a sharp difference between the country people of The Hamlet and the aristocrats of Sartoris. As quoted elsewhere in this study, young Bayard Sartoris cries out against God in plaintive accusation for the death of his brother.[1] In sharp contrast to the weak words of the decayed young aristocrat, is the defiance of Houston, the farmer, after the death of his wife.

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[1] p. 38 above.

> 'I don't understand it,' he would say. 'I don't know why. I won't ever know why. But You can't beat me. I am as strong as You are. You can't beat me.'[1]

The moral interactions of individuals and groups compose the action of The Hamlet. Ab and Mink Snopes are advocates of the right to do exactly as they please, and when this right is successfully contested they burn down barns and commit murder, unprofitable acts of passion. Flem is passionless and devoted to profit. If his quest for profit is hindered, he does not become passionate, he merely hunts a new channel which is not blocked--always without regard for his fellow men. And in the end, Flem creates far more havoc, is tenaciously capable of evil many times the magnitude than if he had only the old-fashioned brand of passionate evil. Flem's ultimate evil is not economic ambition, but his devotion to expediency and rejection of responsibility. He does not care what happens to other men; he has no compassion.

Ratliff has an abundance of compassion, and with his ability to act accomplishes much good, but in the end he is no match for Flem's cold rationality and falls victim to his own human weaknesses so that Flem is able to defeat him too. In the grips of the determinism which so often captures Faulkner's characters, Ratliff lets his emotions tell him there is gold on the Old Frenchman place, and thus

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[1]Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 249.

he becomes one of Flem's final victims before moving on to bigger things in Jefferson. But despite his complete defeat, Ratliff is still the same compassionate man of responsibility. Though the people of Frenchman's Bend have watched with astonishment the passage of the Snopeses through their midst, they, like Ratliff, have remained much the same. Though baffled, outraged, and swindled by Flem they entertain no such despair as was evident in Sartoris. The result of the meeting of Flem's devotion to expediency and the people's belief in trust, pity, honesty, honor, and other values based upon feelings rather than practicality, is an economic triumph for Flem, but it is far from being a moral defeat for the people because their values remain intact.

CHAPTER IV

INTRUDER IN THE DUST

Two distinct moral problems dominate Intruder in the Dust, problems related to each other but rather loosely coordinated in the novel. The first problem is the moral growth of a sixteen-year-old boy, Charles Mallison, and the second is not so much the growth, but the right to do its own moral growing, of the whole South. Chick Mallison's initiation is the action of the novel, and the second problem is dealt with by Gavin Stevens in long sections of oratory. Stevens, a prodigiously well-educated lawyer, appears in Light in August, Go Down Moses, Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun, the last four all published since 1942, and in all of which he spends most of his time trying to help solve other people's problems. Lucas Beauchamp, an unbending old mulatto, is both the stimulus for Chick's maturation and for Steven's defense of the South. He appears first in Go Down Moses.

At age twelve, Chick, complete with the conventional background of a Southern boy of good family, suddenly begins to discover facts about people which do not fit the ideas he has absorbed through his childhood. In Lucas he

finds a Negro who refuses to behave in the manner which the South feels is appropriate for Negroes. Due to a mixed-up genealogy involving both miscegenation and incest, Lucas has the same white man, Carothers McCaslin, for both grandfather and great-grandfather. Along with the white blood and a gold toothpick, Lucas has inherited a strength of will which gives him an independent and rigid dignity, so that Chick "could no more imagine himself contradicting the man striding on ahead of him than he could his grandfather . . ."[1]

Faulkner makes the:

> . . . unmistakable odor of Negroes--that smell which if it were not for something that was going to happen to him . . . he would have gone to his grave never once pondering . . .[2]

into a symbol of Chick's misconceptions about Negroes, about reality, so that he takes four years to realize the smell existed because "being Negroes they were not supposed to have facilities to wash properly or often . . ."[3] Chick's biggest suprise brings about the shame which tenaciously follows him for years when he eats Lucas' meal, trys to pay for it, is spurned, drops the money to the floor in rage, and is forced to take it back. This jarring discovery that a Negro has pride and refuses to be patronized starts Chick

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[1]William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: The New American Library, 1949), p. 8.

[2]Ibid., p. 11.

[3]Ibid., p. 11.

along the road to maturity, so that a few years later when Lucas comes to town after his wife's death and fails to recognize him, Chick is ready to take his first step: "He was grieving. You don't have to not be a nigger in order to grieve . . ."[1] The progressive revelation that a Negro might have a just claim to the feelings, pride, and dignity that had been ingrained in Chick as belonging only to white men is a painful process. It hurts the sense of racial superiority which he has absorbed from those around him, including the Negroes. Along with the other white men of the county Chick would feel better about Lucas "If he would just be a nigger first, just for one second, one little infinitesimal second."[2] But Lucas never relents even for one second.

Thus, as in other novels, Faulkner brings together two differing moral sensibilities with a drastic reaction, at least from Chick's standpoint. Intractable, utterly convinced of his own rightness, Lucas suffers no reaction from his contact with Chick. But Chick is still in a formative state, pliable enough to profit, though with much accompanying pain, from the violation of his too easily acquired conventional ethics. Because he is still flexible, Chick is able to eventually show a better affinity for justice than his lawyer uncle.

With overwhelming evidence that he has murdered

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[1] Ibid., p. 21. [2] Ibid., p. 18.

Vinson Gowrie, a white man, Lucas is put in jail. The men of the county gather at the jail in anticipation of a lynching, and Lucas discovers everyone has already judged him guilty, including Gavin Stevens, Chick's uncle and moral mentor. Stevens agrees to represent Lucas in court but reveals his thorough belief in Lucas' guilt, so that Lucas has to turn to Chick for help. Here Chick reveals his moral superiority over his uncle, over all the adult white men of the county. He helps Lucas:

> . . . because he alone of all the white people Lucas would have a chance to speak to between now and the moment when he might be dragged out of the cell and down the steps at the end of a rope, would hear the mute unhoping urgency of the eyes.[1]

This is the reason why Lucas up to this point had told no one anything. It would have done no good. Faulkner has provided Chick as the only one to come into contact with Lucas who is capable of helping him. The statement of one of Faulkner's critics that Lucas "pretends to be a murderer, wants to be innocently lynched, to add his own blood to the South's dishonor, as his last act of contempt for his oppressors,"[2] shows a complete lack of understanding of Lucas, Chick, and the whole novel. Lucas refuses to relinquish his stubborn integrity but does not hesitate to ask help

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[1] Ibid., p. 54.

[2] Elizabeth Hardwick, "Faulkner and the South Today," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 246.

from Chick, the only one sensitive enough to detect something different from guilt in Lucas' eyes. Lucas certainly does not "want to be innocently lynched . . ."

The only white male willing to help Lucas, Chick is not the only human, and he obtains unexpected aid from Miss Habersham, an old maiden lady. Aleck Sander, Chick's Negro companion, also helps, but from loyalty to Chick rather than a desire to help Lucas. Miss Habersham is one of the older ladies in Faulkner's novels who often show great moral strength and ability for direct positive action, such as Mrs. Littlejohn, Rosa Millard, and Jenny Du Pre. Miss Habersham understands the need for action instead of talk when she says, " 'Lucas knew it would take a child--or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence.' "[1]

This moral blindness or paralysis of adult men is a recurrent theme throughout the book. In Sanctuary the lawyer, Horace Benbow, is blind to the fact that the due processes of law are aiding, screening, the manipulations of his opponents so that injustice triumphs in the end. In Intruder in the Dust Gavin Stevens' belief that known facts constitute the truth blinds him to the possibility that the facts are misleading, and he has to be rescued from being a party to injustice. Even after finding out the truth, Stevens is handicapped by devotion to the law, so that the

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 69.

simple problem of digging up a grave to save a man from lynching becomes to him one complicated by witnesses, driving sixty miles to get a petition from the District Attorney, driving back, and obtaining a court order.[1] To the sheriff, a farmer not bothered by due processes, the problem involves only obtaining a shovel. Faulkner is saying by this, as he has in Sanctuary and other novels, that law and justice are not the same thing, that the law may impede justice and help injustice. Chick remembers a similar circumstance in his childhood when action was impeded by an adult male and the words of an old Negro:

> 'If you got something outside the common run that's got to be done and can't wait, don't waste your time on the menfolks; they works on what your uncle calls the rules and the cases. Get the womens and the children at it; they works on the circumstances.'[2]

It is the ability to act, to avoid being bogged down by their own reasoning, which Faulkner shows to be the valuable trait of women and children. This is one aspect of the advocacy of primitivism which Campbell and Foster find throughout Faulkner's work.[3] The same forces can be compared in As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury where Quentin Compson possesses the complicated mind which confuses him into futility and the Bundrens possess the simplicity

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[1] Ibid., p. 84. [2] Ibid., p. 86.

[3] H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 140.

which allows them to act. Faulkner describes the mental processes of the old woman and the boys as they set out to dig up Vinson Gowrie's grave: ". . . if they had done but one thing tonight it was at least to put all thought ratiocination contemplation behind them . . ."[1]

The people of Beat Four, a rural section of Yoknapatawpha County, play an important part in the novel even though they seldom become part of the foreground action. Populated with farmers, brawlers, foxhunters, and whiskey-makers like the McCallums of Sartoris and some of the people around Frenchman's Bend in The Hamlet, Beat Four is "a synonym for independence and violence."[2] Vinson Gowrie, the murdered man, is a son of Beat Four and related to most of its inhabitants so that the whole county considers Lucas almost already lynched because:

> . . . if Yoknapatawpha County was the wrong place for a nigger to shoot a white man in the back then Beat Four was the last place in Yoknapatawpha County a nigger with any judgment--or any other stranger of any color--would have chosen to shoot anybody least of all one named Gowrie before or behind either . . .[3]

It is the constant presence of Beat Four's collective certainty of coming to town to lynch Lucas that demands immediate action from Lucas' defenders. And not only is the pressure exerted because Beat Four will come to town but because the whole county demands that they lynch Lucas.

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 73.

[2]Ibid., p. 29.

[3]Ibid., p. 22.

The streets of Jefferson filled with white men from all over the county "come not to see what they called justice done nor even retribution exacted but to see that Beat Four should not fail its white man's high estate."[1] With this bitter passage, Faulkner begins to build Chick's sensing of a deadly, anonymous unity in the mob which he eventually sees as the Face, a symbolic solidification of the vacant mercilessness of all their faces.

Despite their independence and violence, the Gowries help Chick take another step closer to that wisdom toward which Lucas had given him the impetus, when he discovers Mr. Gowrie's grief for his murdered son:

> . . . thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not expected it . . . once in an old nigger . . . and now in a violent foul mouthed godless old man who had happened to lose one of the six lazy idle violent more or less lawless a good deal more than just more or less worthless sons . . .[2]

Again Faulkner spells out the strength of primitivism as Mr. Gowrie's grief fails to affect his need for action when he discovers his son's body is missing. When told the body is in quicksand, his feeling of outrage so overwhelms his grief that he runs and jumps into the quicksand to find his son. His fierce repudiation of compromise when action is needed is like that of the Bundrens of As I Lay Dying or the convict in The Old Man. All of this, of course, affects Chick deeply and he never forgets the old man trying to wipe

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[1] Ibid., p. 105. [2] Ibid., p. 124.

the sand from his son's face.

In Light in August, Faulkner first concerned himself with the social plight of the American Negro. Previously Faulkner presented the old Negro woman, Dilsey, with sympathy in The Sound and The Fury but she was troubled by the disintegrating Compson family instead of whites in general. With Go Down Moses, Faulkner began to show the acute interest in the Negro's problems which have played such an important part in his latest books. In Go Down Moses, Isaac McCaslin, who has assumed responsibility for all the sins of the white race says of Negroes: "They are better than we are. Stronger than we are." They possess in abundance virtues which white men lack: "Endurance and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children whether their own or not or black or not."[1]

Chick Mallison in his moral awakening follows much the same pattern of thought as he contemplates what is "not a racial outrage but a human shame."[2] And Lucas makes the problem much more difficult because he is so "opinionated arrogant hardheaded intractable independent (insolent too) . . ."[3] Lucas is poles apart from Simon, the shiftless clown of Sartoris; he is instead an enigma.

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[1]William Faulkner, Go Down Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 294-295.

[2]Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 75.

[3]Ibid., p. 61.

The usual Negro endurance under white injustice is passive with heads bowed and never talking back, but Lucas dares to be proud and never hesitates to speak his mind. It is much easier for a white man to be kind to a Negro whose humility helps bolster his feeling of white superiority. Gavin Stevens explains this to Chick about a storekeeper who is typical of most of the county's white population:

> 'He has nothing against what he calls niggers. If you ask him he will probably tell you he likes them even better than some white folks he knows and he will believe it. They are probably constantly beating him out of a few cents here and there in his store and probably even picking up things . . . under their coats and aprons and he knows it; he probably even gives them things free of charge . . . All he requires is that they act like niggers.'[1]

It is exactly this attitude which Chick has to conquer in himself--and succeeds. He eventually accepts the moral truth that there is no reason why Lucas or any Negro should "act like a nigger" except to feed his, Chick's, own ego. By accepting the responsibility of making sure that injustice is not committed upon the old Negro who refuses to unbend his integrity, Chick morally rises above his Southern heritage so that his uncle comes to him saying: "Maybe I'm not too old to learn either."[2] Thus Chick's collision with Lucas results not only in a drastic change in his own moral sensibility but indirectly affects Gavin by shaming him for his insensitivity.

"Garrulous" seems to be the favorite descriptive

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[1] Ibid., p. 38. [2] Ibid., p. 97.

term applied by the critics to Gavin Stevens, and it seems particularly appropriate when Gavin is compared to Chick and Lucas, for it is his penchant for talking, explaining every situation which blinds him to Lucas' real need for help. Lucas intended to ask Gavin for help, but Gavin was talking when he should have been listening. Chick tried to enlist his uncle's help but was also unable to break through the stream of words. Although Gavin's oratory is in some ways a drawback, it is often for Chick an invaluable moral stimulation and source of ideas.

Gavin does not hesitate to speculate upon any moral question available. The Southern white, the Negro, the North, Europe, and Americans in general are all grist for his moral pronouncements. His long lectures to Chick are analyses of what is good or bad about such groups and the possible results of what they should and should not do. He says of international statesmanship:

> '. . . the premise that man really wants peace and freedom--is the trouble with our relations with Europe right now, whose people not only don't know what peace is but--except for Anglo Saxons--actively fear and distrust personal liberty.[1]

The scholarly Stevens, Harvard Phi Beta Kappa, Heidelberg Ph.D, and Old Miss' lawyer, swings intellectual weight far heavier than any previous important character in Faulkner's novels. Horace Benbow comes closer than any other but is much more effete than Gavin. Horace is incapable

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[1] Ibid., p. 115.

of producing any useful action, while Gavin at least is capable of a kind of constructive midwifery. He helps deliver Chick into moral maturity, and in Requiem for a Nun, he serves much the same function with Temple Drake and his nephew, Gowan.

Like Isaac McCaslin of Go Down Moses, Gavin deplores the injustice of the South toward the Negro and sees splendid qualities in the Negro which the white man lacks:

> '. . . he had patience when he didn't have hope . . . not even just the will but the desire to endure because he loved the old few simple things . . . a little of music (his own), a hearth, not his child but any child, a God a heaven . . . a little earth for his own sweat to fall on among his own green shoots and plants.'[1]

But Gavin goes beyond Isaac's sense of guilt. He agrees with Isaac that the problem can be solved, the injustice to the Negro eliminated and real equality instituted, but it will never happen unless the South is allowed to accomplish this by itself. Gavin's view is one which he considers justified by the very practical reason that Southerners will simply refuse to be forced. Though Faulkner apparently does not intend it, he has endowed the South with the same stubborn integrity he gave Mink Snopes who murdered the man that forced him to pay a pound fee. If the "outlanders" try to force the South to pay the pound fee of justice and equality to the Negro, a reaction will occur which will fling the Negro "decades back not merely into injustice but into grief

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[1] Ibid., p. 120.

and agony and violence too . . ."[1]

Gavin sees nothing perverse in such an attitude because of a valuable quality which he claims is unique with the South and which he calls "homogeneity." He does not bother to clarify the nature of this quality, but it seems to be a kind of community of values which only the South possesses, a sort of brotherhood of freedom.

> So we are not really resisting what the outland calls (and we too) progress and enlightenment. We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life, but simply our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of this country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty in order to continue to afford the United States.[2]

There is presented in William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism two contrasting views of Intruder in the Dust. One critic maintains that "it is a tract, a polemic . . ."[3] Hence, it is a piece of propaganda. The other critic insists that Faulkner is not one "of the intruders upon the art of fiction who violate the Muse for pragmatic purposes . . ."[4] He feels that the moral problems of the novel are merely the matrix around which Faulkner has created a work of art. Actually there is evidence to substantiate both viewpoints. In a story which is entirely

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[1]Ibid., p. 155. [2]Ibid., p. 118.

[3]Hardwick, "Faulkner and the South Today," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 246.

[4]Andrew Lytle, "Regeneration for the Man," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, p. 251.

about the South, in which the North has no part whatsoever, Gavin Stevens suddenly gives forth with sermons predicting disaster if the North and the rest of the United States try to interfere in the South's problems. After the sermons, the novel again reverts to its purely Southern action. These sermons could be scratched with no artistic loss to the novel, but no other part could be so treated. One way to reconcile the two critics is to view the lectures as propaganda interjected into what is otherwise a work of art built around the moral growth of Chick Mallison. But the long-winded lectures can be defended artistically as being consistent with Gavin's devotion to ideas and talk rather than action. Since Gavin is inclined to speculate and generalize about almost any moral problem and these particular ideas are ones that would be intensely important to a Southerner of his intellectual caliber, perhaps they are not so much out of place. It is exactly this preoccupation with contemplation which blocks his ability to act, and these happen to be the ideas with which he is preoccupied, ideas which in a kind of secondhand way are related to Chick's problem of moral growth since they are about the moral growth of the South and the whole United States.

Chick's moral growth shows a marked contrast to the moral condition of Ratliff in The Hamlet. Ratliff starts out with only the best of motives and shows himself capable of very rational and kindly action. He helps others and

does his best in combatting Flem Snopes, but in the end becomes irrationally greedy and is soundly defeated by Flem. Chick, starting out with a defeat when Lucas shames him with his own money, resents Lucas' refusal to kowtow to him in recognition of his racial superiority. Even after he has learned to accept his shame, Chick cannot resist gloating to himself when he visits Lucas in jail and in danger of being lynched: " 'He's just a nigger after all for all his high nose and his stiff neck and his gold watch chain . . .' "[1] But he grows until he expiates his own shame and then feels shame for his whole race and gives ungrudging respect to Lucas.

By conquering the irrational dictates of his ego, Chick shows that he operates with a free will; he is able to live by reason, which Bayard Sartoris was not. Determinism is not exhibited to an important degree by any of the characters in Intruder in the Dust. Even old Mr. Gowrie listens to sheriff Hampton when he knows he will benefit, despite his aversion for the law. Gavin Stevens learns the danger of pre-judging a man without really digging in to make sure of the truth and concludes that each man has a responsibility to his fellows to find the truth and act.

> 'Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 46.

the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them.'[1]

The lack of determinism and abundant operation of free will in the novel goes along with a shift in the psychological basis of the characters' moral operations. In Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner's previous stress upon an inherent, inborn irrationality in men which causes their evilness gives way to a learned irrationality, a conditioning which can be conquered if the individual tries hard enough, as did Chick Mallison. There is no attempt in this novel to answer any metaphysical questions; man's relationship to man is the total problem without regard for the ultimate nature of good and evil or the existence of a deity. Chick's painful ordeal is symbolic of the struggle of the whole South for a rational ethic by which all men can live in harmony, and his triumph can be the triumph of the whole South at sometime in the future. Casuistically Faulkner is saying that a passive life of avoiding evil is not enough, that active acceptance of responsibility to see that one's fellow men receive justice and sympathetic aid is the highest form of good which can eventually allow men to live in peace with each other.

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[1] Ibid., p. 157.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The label "traditional moralist"[1] which George Marion O'Donnell applied to Faulkner performed the valuable service of pointing out that Faulkner is seriously concerned with moral problems rather than striving for the sensationalism of which many of his early critics accused him. However O'Donnell's belief that the tradition-bound aristocrats in Faulkner's novels represent "vital morality, humanism,"[2] and that Faulkner is devoted to the tradition as the good has been rejected by later critics. Robert Penn Warren and Irving Howe disagree with O'Donnell, as do H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster.

In Sartoris Faulkner shows the tradition as a one-time source of strength to the Southern aristocrat because it was a system which demanded action in the service of the pride and honor upon which it was based. But unless shaped by a man of ambition like Colonel John Sartoris, the tradition generated little more than the spirit of pure fun with

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[1] O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 49.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

which so many of the Sartorises pursued reckless excitement. Even though Colonel John became a creator and builder, his adherence to the tradition made him strong only in a harsh and violent way. Because it lacked compassion, devotion to justice, responsibility, and patience the tradition decayed. The old, gentleman's code of honor found no place in the modern world of speed and cheap commercialism, because those values which are necessary to the accomplishment of good in such a world are missing.

A dislike for the modern world, to which he ascribes almost no virtues, is evident throughout Faulkner's novels. Gavin Stevens speaks of modern America as:

> . . . a spurious uproar produced by men deliberately fostering and then getting rich on our national passion for the mediocre: who will even accept the best provided it is debased and befouled before being fed to us: who are the only people on earth who brag publicly of being second-rate, i.e., low-brows.[1]

And it is just such men as Flem Snopes who are doing the "fostering and then getting rich." Flem, along with Jason Compson and others like them, is the type of soulless exploiter who thrives in the world of shallow values which Gavin describes. Coldly rational, these exploiters recognize no responsibility to their fellow men and are thus capable of performing any act by which they may profit. That this is not just an attitude assumed for its artistic usefulness and that he personally dislikes much of what he

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in The Dust, p. 119.

sees in modern America is made clear by a recent article he has written. Faulkner feels that America is throwing away freedom in order to "hold our individual place on a public relief roll or at a bureacratic or political or any other organization's gravy-trough."[1]

Faulkner does not like the modern world; and since the tradition, lacking compassion, responsibility, and patience is inadequate, for virtue he goes to unsophisticated people who are not closely associated with either modernism or the aristocratic tradition. Of this primitivism there has been considerable critical analysis, the most extensive by H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster who have devoted a chapter of their book on Faulkner to this subject. They have pointed out that most of Faulkner's virtuous characters, those with strength enough to perform virtuous actions, are primitive or possessed of a natural simplicity, such as Negroes, children, idiots, poor whites, Indians, and back-country farmers.

The primitives in Faulkner's work are not submissive saints like Dostoyevsky's Sonia in Crime and Punishment, instead they are often passionately violent. But they are seldom afflicted by the weakness, confusion, futility, or lack of values which are possessed separately or collectively by the aristocrats and sophisticates such as Bayard Sartoris, Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson, Temple Drake, and

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[1]William Faulkner, "The Duty to Be Free," Des Moines Register, July 4, 1953, p. 4.

many others. The MacCallums of Sartoris live simply with an abiding love for the land and nature, and the itinerant sewing machine agent, called V. K. Suratt in Sartoris and V. K. Ratliff in The Hamlet, exhibits a very active compassion and a sense of responsibility for justice comparable to that of the young boy, Chick Mallison, in Intruder in The Dust. The Negroes, especially in the later novels, are attributed with numerous virtues lacking in the white race, especially the ability to endure injustice and opression. The most outstanding characteristic of the simple people in contrast with the adult white male sophisticate or aristocrat is their strength and ability for direct action. The use to which they put this strength often seems irrational and gives rise to much of Faulkner's ironic humor, but this strength saves them from the confused despair which frequently troubles the more complex characters.

Faulkner's approval of primitivism seems to be somewhat similar to the advocacy of the state of nature by the English romantic writers and is in harmony with Thomas Jefferson's belief in the natural man. An examination of the state of nature as hypothecated by Locke[1] and Rousseau[2] shows that many of the qualities which they theorized for man in such a state may be found in what seems to be a

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[1]John Locke, Of Civil Government: Second Essay (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), pp. 2-10.

[2]Jean Jacques Rousseau, On the Origin of Inequality (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), pp. 25-65.

similar idea in Faulkner's work. No intention is meant to imply a direct influence upon Faulkner's work by Locke and Rousseau, but there is a similarity worth remarking.

The basic difference between Locke and Rousseau is that man's virtue in the state of nature for Locke comes from reason while for Rousseau it comes from intuition, but it is practically impossible to make a clear distinction between reason and intuition as used by the two. Faulkner's state of nature is probably best described as intuitional because his actively virtuous characters seldom arrive at their ideas through introspection, ratiocination, or dialectic. They react quickly to their own situation without complicated reasoning processes.

Rousseau says that man has one virtue which is inherent in the state of nature for certain.[1] That virtue is compassion, and if there is one virtue which Faulkner's characters who are closer to the state of nature--young Chick, the MacCallums, Ratliff, the Negroes--hold in immensely greater measure than the more sophisticated characters, it is compassion.

The encroachment of government upon man's freedom is deplored by both Locke and Faulkner. Locke admits the necessity of civil government to correct the abuses of the state of nature but warns that government must be as close to the state of nature as possible in order for man to remain

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[1] Ibid., p. 50.

free. Gavin Stevens expresses much the same belief when he speaks of "that minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty . . ."[1] Locke sees the state of nature as one of complete freedom within certain bounds, which are: that no one ought to harm another's life, health, liberty, or possessions. In addition there are duties which go with the equality of man, which are: to punish offenders of the above law of nature and preserve the innocent.[2] In the state of nature, these are duties of each individual because there is no government. This describes much the situation around Frenchman's Bend in The Hamlet where the people held themselves relatively independent of the law and "were their own courts, judges, and executioners."[3] To "preserve the innocent" Chick Mallison in Intruder in The Dust has to go outside the law and thus accepts the responsibility of seeing justice done despite the government--taking the duty upon himself as would man in the state of nature.

In Requiem for a Nun, Faulkner writes in very outspoken approval of the state of nature. When the people of the wilderness settlement, later to become Jefferson, were without government, they lived in a condition of individual

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in The Dust, p. 118.

[2]John Locke, Of Civil Government: Second Essay, pp. 2-5.

[3]Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 5.

responsibility, and when they took their first steps toward civil government they took their first steps away from freedom. In his article The Duty to be Free, Faulkner speaks of the same frontier period and says that life was founded in "the inalienable duty of man to be free and independent and responsible," which most Americans have since lost.[1]

A most striking parallel may be found in Rousseau and Faulkner concerning the state of nature and the ownership of land. Rousseau believes that the first man to claim ownership of a piece of ground and get away with it started civil society. Man would have been saved from a multitude of wars, crimes, murders, horrors, and misfortunes had someone stopped it and cried out, " 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.' "[2] Compare with this Isaac McCaslin's belief in Go Down Moses that God did not create man:

> '. . . to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood . . .'[3]

Because of this belief, McCaslin repudiated his inheritance of a large plantation. He felt that no man had the right to

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[1]Faulkner, "The Duty to Be Free," Des Moines Register, July 4, 1953, p. 4.

[2]Rousseau, On The Origin of Inequality, p. 62.

[3]Faulkner, Go Down Moses, p. 257.

claim ownership of land.

Faulkner's state of nature then combines some of the features found in Locke's and Rousseau's positions. It is a condition of freedom and equality in which men live in mutual respect and individual acceptance of responsibility, where men act promptly on this responsibility more or less intuitively without the danger of futility involved in complicated reasoning processes. The ideal would be no government at all with the earth shared in common and compassion ruling men's actions rather than either a tradition of formalized pride and honor or the shallow modern values of selfish materialism. No wonder Narcissa Benbow with her cheap respectability, Bayard Sartoris with his irresponsibility, Flem Snopes with his complete lack of compassion, and Gavin Stevens with his mental tangle all find Faulkner's disapproval to a great or small degree. However, Faulkner seems to accept the fact that man will never go back to a state of anarchy and communal ownership of the earth.

In two of his most recent books, Knight's Gambit and Requiem for a Nun, Gavin Stevens has lost much of the lethargy toward moral action which plagues him in Intruder in the Dust. Though he is the county attorney, he does not hesitate to step outside the law to preserve justice, and he becomes kind of a buffer between the simple, more natural people and modern society. In Requiem for a Nun, Gavin actually succeeds in impressing upon two modern sophisticates

the nature of the primitive virtue in a Negro prostitute who has murdered their child. He makes them understand what Nancy has tried to do for them and their other child and thereby teaches them the compassion, tolerance, and responsibility which their modern world lacks. Just as Will Falls supplied a cure handed down from the Indians for old Bayard Sartoris' wen, Faulkner seems to be saying that the state of nature offers the best answers to the modern man's moral problems.

Despite expressed belief in "our heritage of free will and decision,"[1] Faulkner has created a large number of characters who act deterministically. Their actions come from some irrational subconscious causes within them rather than from conscious reasoning and decision. This determinism is found in all of the social, educational, and racial groups of Faulkner's work. The death wish of young Bayard Sartoris, Quentin Compson, and others; the power of sex; the isolation of Bayard Sartoris, Joe Christmas, and Mink Snopes; and the frequent violence all seem to be symbols connected with this irrational determinism. Chick Mallison in a rather astute observation for a sixteen year old boy ponders on:

> . . . man who apparently had to kill man not for motive or reason but simply for the sake the need the compulsion of having to kill man, inventing creating his motive and reason afterward so that

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[1]Faulkner, "Faith or Fear," The Atlantic, p. 54.

> he could still stand up among men as a rational creature . . .[1]

This very determinism which Chick finds in murder manifests itself in many ways, such as Narcissa Benbow's ambivalence toward the Sartorises and the obscene letters from her Snopes admirer. On the conscious level of her mind, she despised the irresponsible violence of the Sartorises and the obscenity of the letters, but below this was a strong, ambiguous fascination with both of them.

This determinism is not, however, all-pervading, though it is nearly so in Faulkner's earlier novels. Ratliff throughout most of The Hamlet is a man of reason. His decisions are a rational functioning of free will, but he too eventually falls victim to the Snopeses and becomes one of "the folks that can't wait to bare their backsides to them."[2] It is when Ratliff turns from the virtues of compassion and responsibility, which he maintains through most of the novel, that he becomes deterministic. Chick Mallison is almost an object lesson of what free will can accomplish. Since he is not an adult, he can be classified as a primitive, and it is his intuitive sensing of a pleading in Lucas' eyes, plus his exercise of free will in choosing to reject the ideas of white supremacy which he has learned, which allows him to oppose almost the whole county in the interest of justice.

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in The Dust, pp. 90-91.

[2]Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 367.

It is important to point out here that intuition, though unsystematic, does not mean irrationality, so that the primitive acting on intuition is not being deterministic.

Action from conscious exercise of free will is exhibited by Isaac McCaslin in Go Down Moses, and in Requiem for a Nun, Temple Drake goes through a conscious examination of her own values, guided by Gavin Stevens, and comes to a rational decision. Thus it may be seen that in the later novels there is a greater number of characters exhibiting free will, which tends to bring his work more in conformance with Faulkner's own personal philosophy as expressed in his Faith or Fear speech. That free will alone is not enough Faulkner makes clear with his creation of Flem Snopes--a figure who is rational but completely lacking in compassion and is therefore capable of evil to a monstrous degree. Faulkner seems to be saying that man has in him a large capacity for irrationality which brings about much of the tragedy of the human condition as men tread blindly in their deterministic paths. But man is also capable of exercising free will if he will only try to examine his own condition.

Aside from the earthly level of morality in Faulkner's novels, there is also a kind of elusive metaphysic, which H. M. Campbell and R. E. Foster have expressed as "the myth of cosmic pessimism." This myth states that man lives in a chaotic universe where virtue has "no prospect

of any cosmic compensation either in this world or another."[1] Good people, like Houston of The Hamlet suffer despite their virtue, and the innocent are lynched, as in Sanctuary. The essence of cosmic pessimism is that there is no divine power rewarding the good and punishing the wicked evident anywhere in Faulkner's novels. If there does occur intimations of a deity, he is bored and indifferent as in the long passage at the end of Sartoris or confused as in Go Down Moses. Campbell and Foster find that cosmic pessimism prevails throughout all of Faulkner's work without significant change.

As far as reward in a future life is concerned, they are right in concluding that Faulkner offers no hope, but their term cosmic pessimism implies that Faulkner sees the universe as unalterably constructed so that there is no hope of reward for virtue in this world. It is true that in the society which he describes in his early novels reward and suffering occur at random. But Faulkner seems to believe that there were times in the past when merit was rewarded and hopes that such times will come again.

They admit that in his later novels:

> Faulkner has a larger number of morally good characters than he has had in his earlier books and these characters are able to obtain some solid, if stoical, satisfaction out of life . . .[2]

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[1]Campbell and Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal, p. 115.

[2]Ibid., p. 138.

In fact there seems to be no evidence to support their conclusion that "In these works, too, cosmic pessimism is still the main element in Faulkner's philosophical attitude."[1]

There is nothing in Intruder in The Dust to sustain cosmic pessimism as "the main element in Faulkner's philosophical attitude." The primary problems are ones of man's relationship to man, not man's relationship to the cosmos. In his earlier books, there are occasional references to a deity but usually in an ironically metaphorical manner. They seem to be nothing more than bits of poetry added to enhance the intended emotional mood. Even in these early books, Faulkner seems to be mainly occupied with the earthly effect of man's actions upon himself and others. In his later books this is even more obvious.

It is true that Intruder in The Dust does not intimate there is a cosmic reward for virtue, but it is true because Faulkner simply is not primarily concerned with theology or metaphysics in this or in any of his other novels. He is not writing about the lack of a reward in the Christian or any other hereafter or even about divine indifference to man's earthly plight. He is writing about possibilities of men solving moral problems which need to be solved in order for them to lead a peaceful life on earth, the most pronounced of which in Intruder in The Dust is the elimination of injustice to the Negroes. The prevailing attitude, as

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[1]Ibid., p. 139.

voiced by Gavin Stevens, is one of long-range optimism if the South is allowed to settle its own problems.

> 'Someday Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man's children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it. But it wont be next Tuesday.'[1]

In the "philosophical attitude" expressed in Intruder in The Dust, the "main element" seems to be a very modest earthly hope that man can solve his own moral problems, an earthly hope rather than a cosmic pessimism.

Along with an increased manifestation of free will in Faulkner's later novels and a tempering of the despair which is very strong in the early novels, the Negro has assumed an increasing moral importance. In Sartoris, Simon and Caspey supplied little more than comedy to the novel, while in Intruder in The Dust, Lucas Beauchamp is the focal point in a struggle for justice, and Negroes in general are endowed with many virtues which the white man lacks. This change in attitude has received more critical attention recently than any other moral aspect of Faulkner's work.

In an attempt to crystallize the moral concepts in Faulkner's work, Irving Howe declares that Faulkner is moving ever away from honor and that "his distinctive moral position . . . is an implicit affirmation of integrity . . ."

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[1]Faulkner, Intruder in The Dust, p. 119.

To clarify his distinctions, Howe says:

> Honor points to what one is in society, integrity to what one is in oneself. Honor involves a relation to others, a condition of pride and dignity, a level of status and reputation; integrity a security of being and ease of conscience.[1]

In making his distinctions however, Howe is making the unwarranted assumption that honor and integrity should both be ranked as ends of moral behavior. It is probably better to say that integrity, "security of being and ease of conscience," Howe's own definition, is always the end sought by any form of behavior and that honor is one means which attempts to reach this end. Colonel John Sartoris by adhering to the code of honor demanded by his conscience achieved not only respect from society but was true to himself. A man who truly believes in the code of honor and adheres to it is a man of integrity, it has already been shown that Faulkner has found the code of honor lacking in moral values. Therefore Faulkner's position must be something more than a bare "affirmation of integrity."

Integrity by itself does not seem to be specific enough, for Ab and Mink Snopes were seen to be dedicated to integrity. Perverse and destructive, it is nevertheless integrity. In order to be virtuous, integrity must be based on two primitive values which are natural in man but have been greatly suppressed by modern society, so Faulkner seems

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[1]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, pp. 102-103.

to be saying. One of these values, compassion, is mentioned frequently in the Nobel Prize Award Speech, and the other, responsibility, about which Faulkner has written a widely published article. These two values are very closely associated but distinct. Compassion is an actively sympathetic love of man, while responsibility is the accountability of the individual necessary for living in dignified freedom. This general responsibility includes the duty of the individual "to be responsible for the consequences of his own acts,"[1] to himself and his fellow man--to see that he has justice--which overlaps with compassion.

Young Bayard Sartoris was not compassionate; he was not interested in other people. In this state of isolation he was also irresponsible and thereby caused much pain and injury to himself and other people. There were practically no values in his life which might be called good so that he had no way of finding integrity, the "security of being and ease of conscience," as Howe puts it, which would have satisfied his directionless searching. To Flem Snopes integrity is completely meaningless because it would have no utility for him. Flem is compassionless and irresponsible but in a planned and purposeful manner calculated to bring him profit at any expense to his fellow man. This puts everyone who tries to maintain any kind of integrity at a

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[1]Faulkner, "The Duty to Be Free," Des Moines Register, July 4, 1953, p. 4.

disadvantage with Flem, a disadvantage which Flem never fails to exploit, and he is thus capable of many times the evil of an ordinary man. Ratliff, a man of integrity, possesses the compassion and responsibility typical of the good and simple people of the land--those closest to the state of nature. Like Ratliff, Chick Mallison is responsible not only to his fellow man but for him. He accepts the responsibility to see that Lucas is given justice, and his compassion causes him much pain as he observes the sorry behavior of his fellow white men.

The action in his novels largely affirms Faulkner's own expressed belief that the modern world has lost the capacity for compassion and responsibility which the natural men of the frontier knew and which survives in the Negroes and the simple people close to nature. The possibility that man can again find and put into practice this compassion and responsibility is Faulkner's hope that man may once again know integrity instead of expedient and selfish compromise, and thus William Faulkner will no doubt continue to write of "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing."[1]

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[1]Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Award Speech," Saturday Review Reader, p. 68.

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